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U.S. NUCLEAR STRATEGY:  
FOCUS ON "INTENT"

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## Report Documentation Page

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**INTRODUCTION.** Reviewing the massive nuclear capabilities of the United States and the Soviet Union causes me to ponder what can be done to diminish the threat of global destruction. Must we live under threats too abhorrent to ponder? Is there no other method to deterrence than escalating power of destruction and mutually assured destruction?

After studying nuclear strategy and contemplating the ramifications of massive nuclear destruction I concluded there is room for divergent thinking on the subject. The rapidly changing international context may afford the opportunity for new initiatives to decrease the threat to the environment, to civilization, and increase the sense of nuclear security.

Any strategy of deterrence must be credible and effective. To be credible it must be plausible in its approach to preserving the interests of the nation. Effectiveness is the more difficult test, since deterrence is about the future. At any time we can look back and see the result of a strategy of deterrence, but we can never look into the future to test its validity. Since deterrence is a "prevention" strategy focused on influencing future decisions of a potential adversary the direct measurement of success can't be made in the past tense. The best we can hope for is an utmost thoroughness and accuracy in our thinking when composing the strategy of deterrence, thus the motive of this paper.

**BACKGROUND.** The Old Testament has a unique word for describing peace. It is "Shalom", and it has a special meaning beyond our daily contextual use of "peace" meaning: "the absence of conflict." Shalom is defined as: the plenitude of life involving length of days in

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fullness of strength, covenantal unity within the community and with God, freedom from fear of enemies or calamity, and immortality achieved when gathered to one's ancestors. The Christian Gospel compels the Christian not merely to avoid aggression or conflict but also to actively work to bring about peace. To make peace there has to be an "intention for peace." "Intent" is the element of strategy that must be kept in focus if peace in the sense of "shalom" is to be achieved.

With the advent of the nuclear age when the U.S. dropped the first weapon on Japan the challenge of governing nuclear weapons was thrust upon the world. Once the Soviet Union emerged as a nuclear power a race of escalating capabilities ensued. First and everpresent has been a growth in total numbers of weapons, then came hardening of silos, fleet ballistic missile submarines, increased range of missiles, increased throw weight, increased accuracy, multiple reentry vehicles, and SDI. The question to be asked is: "Has the escalation in nuclear capabilities been the resultant product of an intention for peace?"

Is it possible the actions of the U.S. as they conveyed the perception of our intentions fueled the fires of escalation in the nuclear arms race? Could it be that the U.S. cherishes the myth of anti-Communism more than it cherishes peace? Is it indeed nuclear weapons that have deterred war or could it not have been a human decision not to use them?

When the U.S. Catholic Bishops issued their Pastoral Letter on nuclear strategy they addressed the dilemma posed by nuclear weapons

based on moral and historical religious precedence. The following clarifications of "Christian" ethos were provided:

(1) The mere possession of nuclear weapons is morally ambiguous.

At their best purpose (deterrence) they are merely tolerable.

(2) Possession is tolerable only for the present world status and then, only under the conditions we adopt:

A. a firm resolve never to use them.

B. a firm resolve to assure their abolition.

(3) While unilateral nuclear disarmament may not be a clear moral mandate, we should take unilateral steps toward multi-lateral disarmament.

In short, they said (1) any policy/strategy we adopt must make war less likely; and (2) any policy/strategy must increase the possibility of arms reductions. Some would argue the Catholic Bishops have made a moral issue out of "deterrence" because it involves the nuclear threat. They stressed that to pursue policies making war less likely, even though involving threat, is to intend the avoidance of war. They see deterrence as morally sanctioned provided we meet the criteria of "making war less likely".

**DETERRENCE.** Deterrence is the use of military means to achieve an uncertain psychological effect without hostile contact. To achieve deterrence two conditions must exist. First, one must have an assured capability to inflict damage of unacceptable cost upon the enemy. Second, one must have issued the threat, declaring the intent of inflicting the unacceptable damage upon the enemy based upon some behavioral condition exhibited by the enemy.

In my own attempt at understanding deterrence and its relation to an escalating nuclear arms race I found it necessary to analyze the effect of our conveyed deterrent threat (intention) under (a) the presumption of Soviet intent, (b) the absence of present intent but with intention reserved as a future option, and (c) the complete lack of Soviet intent to be an aggressor with nuclear consequence. Figure 1 represents my thoughts about the status of the world order given our everpresent nuclear threat.

### NUCLEAR AGGRESSION

#### INTENTION OF IDENTIFIED FOE

		INTENT	NO INTENT YET	NO INTENT
D	FAILED	N. WAR & AGGRESSION	ABSENCE OF PEACE	? ? ? ?
E				
T				
H	NOT YET	ABSENCE OF	ABSENCE OF	ABSENCE OF
R	FAILED	PEACE	PEACE	PEACE
E				
A				
N				
T	SUCCESS	UNRECOG- NIZABLE	ABSENCE OF PEACE	ABSENCE OF PEACE
E				

figure 1.

For the sake of divergent thought in exploring this topic let us examine the resultant when the deterrent threat is issued by the U.S. and the potential aggressor is the Soviet Union. Obviously, failed deterrence with aggressor intent results in war. Failed deterrence with no aggressor intent is meaningless. Examining "success" with aggressor intent cannot be proven, because of the nature of deterrence influencing human judgments yet to be made. The future cannot be proven. What is left in the remaining blocks is an absence

of nuclear war, but because of the everpresent nuclear deterrent threat there is an absence of peace (shalom).

Focusing first on the fact that the U.S. was the first to develop and employ nuclear weapons, then reverse the roles in figure 1 I come to the conclusion our nuclear threat may well have driven our own problems. If it is the Soviet who feels compelled to maintain a deterrence to U.S. aggression then the potential aggression of the U.S. with its increasing capabilities does not lead to a sense of increased security.

Isn't it possible U.S. posturing and rehearsal of an ominous triad capability (albeit, built to guarantee second strike ability) can be easily perceived as a potent first strike (aggressor) capability. The questions to be answered for the U.S. are: (1) Has our nuclear capacity generated a deterrence response by the potential foe that we misconstrued as a signal of "intent"?, and (2) Is it possible to devise a nuclear strategy decreasing the emphasis on "threat" and "intent" yet maintaining a surety of second strike capability?

For the sake of hypothetical examination I constructed figure 2 to facilitate a comparison of conditions between a threat deterrence (figure 1) and a non-threat deterrence. I recognize at the outset the absolute concept of deterrence without threat is not possible, but attempt to conceptualize it for the purpose of stimulating divergent thought. Nuclear weapons cannot be disinveted and as long as they exist there will always be a degree of threat. Of significance in the comparison however is that "shalom" is only attainable under the mutual conditions of 'no-threat'. Accepting "Shalom" as the highest

objective or "END" for our strategy then the means must include measures and capabilities (1) maintaining the effectiveness of deterrence while, (2) continually moving toward diminished expression of "threat" with recurring assurance of "no-intent". Our strategy built around a focus on the effects of "intent" must avoid a stalemate condition and institute a process continually building upon and reinforcing confidence.

### NUCLEAR AGGRESSION

#### INTENTION OF IDENTIFIED FOE

		INTENT	NO INTENT YET	NO INTENT
N D	FAILED	N. WAR & AGGRESSION	ABSENCE OF WAR	? ? ? ?
O E				
N T				
T E	NOT YET FAILED	ABSENCE OF WAR	ABSENCE OF WAR	ABSENCE OF WAR
H R				
R E				
E N				
A C	SUCCESS	NON-WAR DECISION	ABSENCE OF WAR	PEACE SHALOM
T E				

figure 2.

In the following discussion I will attempt to utilize the framework for a national strategy to describe what I believe to be the critical elements of a nuclear strategy capable of diminishing the threat to world security. A strategic plan designed to sustain a process of confidence building and ensure the desired deterrent psychological effect on human decision making.

POLITICAL OBJECTIVES. Foremost among our political objectives is to ensure nuclear war never occurs and the possibility of nuclear accident or incident is minimized. In the U.S. the budget will play

an important role in determining the national strategy. There exists an incentive among the populace and Congress to realize an observable benefit from the "Peace Dividend".

One risk to an effective deterrence policy is that sizeable reductions in conventional strength can act as a destabilizing factor. In the deterrence equation if one assumes the presence of hostile intent by the potential aggressor then conventional strength helps to deter aggressor actions. With conventional aggression deterred the potential to escalate to nuclear confrontation is minimized. Thus, our national strategy must resist the temptation to cut drastically conventional strength in search of the peace dividend and increase our reliance on nuclear weapons. Increased reliance on nuclear weapons will only convey a greater willingness to use them and thus increase the sense of threat. This is counter to the direction called for by the Catholic Bishops of moving toward increased confidence between nations.

Our allies, without large conventional forces, rely on our nuclear umbrella to deter Soviet nuclear aggression. They have a keen and vested interest in our nuclear strategy. Our strategy must address their sense of security as well as our own. Any change must be gradual and made with an adequate vision of the future to allow their sense of security to build and evolve with our own. A precipitous change in strategy on our part could motivate our allies to embark on their own arms escalation or worse embark on their own nuclear programs. We need our alliances to keep them secure under our umbrella, yet we cannot be leveraged into actions not conducive to

confidence building because of self-determination issues advocated by them.

The Soviets need time and space to concentrate on their domestic priorities. The context at this time is most conducive to a new strategic direction resulting in cost savings for the Soviets. To negotiate new and lower ceilings on nuclear and conventional forces now will match the most paramount needs of the Soviet Union. Acceptance on their part will serve as a powerful indicator of their "intent". As with the U.S. posture, we must be careful not to advocate restrictions on conventional forces so stringent as to precipitate increased reliance on nuclear weapons.

**MILITARY OBJECTIVES.** Our military objectives in nuclear deterrence must be looked at from both the peacetime and wartime perspective. In peacetime the objective is to ensure the decision to use nuclear force and/or initiate aggression with the potential for nuclear consequence is never arrived at by the enemy. The factors contributing to the non-decision are (1) the signaling of our willingness to use retaliatory force (the threat), (2) the surety of our ability to inflict damage even after receiving a first strike (survivability of nuclear forces), and (3) the extent of retaliatory damage will be above the threshold of "acceptable damage". To achieve "deterrence" our objective must be to produce an enemy evaluation of the three criteria above resulting in the conclusion that aggression will result in a certain and unacceptable loss. The challenge is to have a credible posture in each of the areas above while progressing toward increased confidence in our peaceful intention and decreasing threat.

The wartime objective for a nuclear strategy is to (1) survive any nuclear attack, and (2) conduct an attack of sufficient proportion to cause the enemy to cease hostilities. To achieve the wartime objective requires effective defense of our center of gravity and effective targeting of their center of gravity. I consider the center of gravity in a nuclear war to have two dimensions. The first has to do with the range or diversity and distribution of targets encompassing the center of gravity. The second has to do with the depth or number of targets encompassing the center of gravity that must be destroyed to cross the threshold of unacceptable cost. For the U.S. the nuclear triad has maintained not only the surety of second strike capability needed in the peacetime deterrence role, but also has served to diversify the targets to be destroyed if the Soviets identify military capability as our center of gravity. The depth attribute addresses how much loss is necessary to bring about a cessation of hostilities decision. If the Soviets identify our cities and economic infrastructure as our center of gravity I don't believe the people and political leaders of the U.S. are willing to accept many losses before the threshold of tolerance has been crossed. Furthermore, I don't believe in a singular center of gravity but rather several potential pressure points that have the potential for functioning as the fulcrum in a decision about furtherance of war. I constructed figure 3 to depict the range and depth differentiation of key areas I believe are potential centers of gravity for the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

If you accept that there can be more than one center of gravity and you accept the concept of range and depth definition of a threshold point for each potential center of gravity then you can discern significant differences in the utility of nuclear forces in

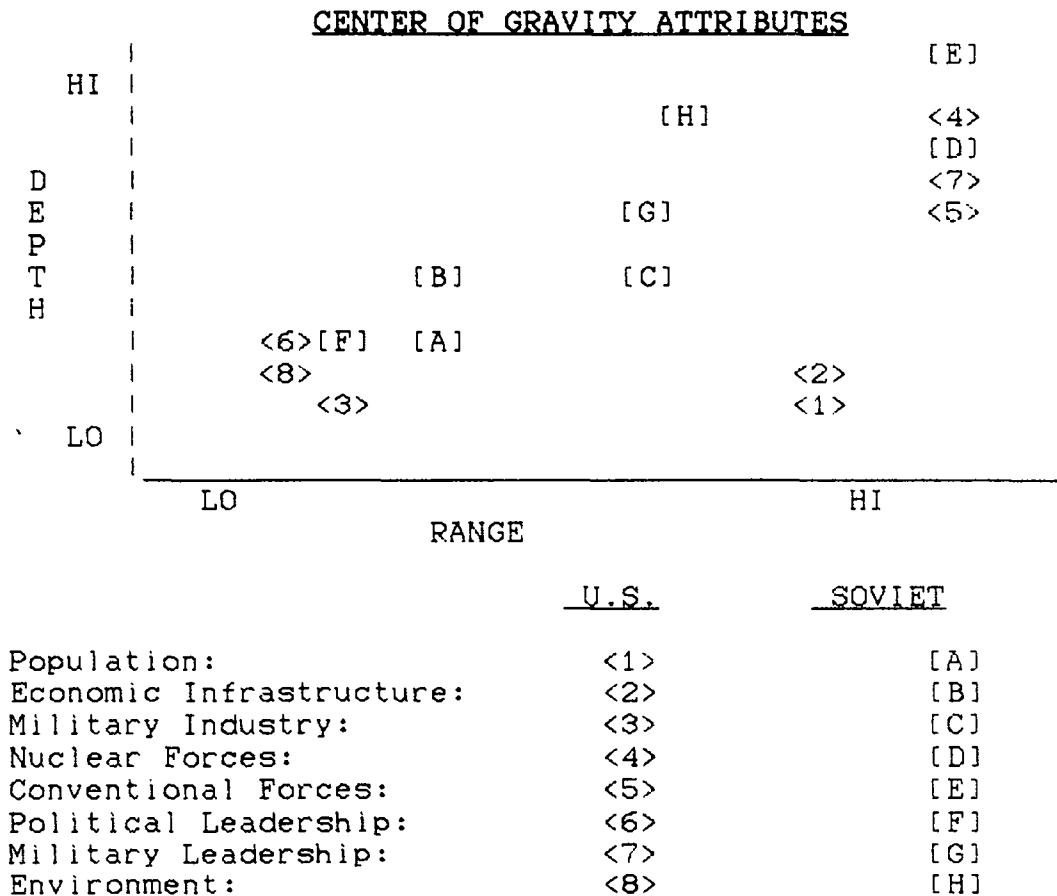


Figure 3.

the deterrent role versus wartime role. Even if you evaluate the range/depth threshold points differently than I did you would probably still produce a dispersal of points. Because of that figure 3 is useful in illustrating the following: (1) The surety of second strike capability does not insure against an unacceptable first strike loss, and (2) Careful selection of the enemy's most vulnerable center of gravity can result in infliction of unacceptable loss without massive exchange of nuclear weapons.

Historically we have assumed the Soviet Union has always coveted the intention of being the aggressor. Commensurate with that has been the assumption of their inordinately high threshold of unacceptable loss before capitulation. It is my belief those assumptions led us to the stockpiling of an arsenal beyond the need of both deterrence and wartime victory.

MILITARY CAPABILITIES & VULNERABILITIES. My basic premise is that both the United States and Soviet Union have more weapons than are necessary to produce a capitulation decision in the other. I believe that because: (1) The U.S. presumption of evil intent for the Soviet Union has allowed us to interpret their every gain in capability as evidence of aggressive intent; (2) Every increased capability by the U.S. produced the motive force for expanded capability in the Soviet Union; (3) We have overestimated the threshold value of "unacceptable loss" needed to deter the Soviet leaders; (4) We have deployed our nuclear forces in a manner guaranteeing the option of "first use"; and (5) Technological progression has sustained the advantage/disadvantage equation which has served only to stimulate growth in nuclear capability.

Each country has developed survivable nuclear forces to ensure second strike capability. Each has a reserve force in its weapons inventory. And, each country's quality of life is at risk because of the other's nuclear capability. Even with the initial START treaty the capability of each country will not diminish. The concept of capping the escalation is absolutely appropriate and now is the time to reverse the trend and commence the reduction in nuclear arms.

The United States with its more developed infrastructure systems actually has a greater vulnerability than the USSR. The economic disadvantage of nuclear war is greater for the U.S. Additionally, the difference in civil defense systems places the threshold of unacceptable loss for the U.S. much lower than that of the USSR. Another factor within the U.S. is the greater sensitivity of the U.S. population to the environment. The environmental awareness of the population leads me to conclude that the U.S. people and political leaders would be very motivated to terminate a nuclear exchange much earlier than the Soviet leadership.

SDI possesses an increase in threat to the USSR if it becomes a viable defensive system against their strategic weapons. If it produces the capability to negate a first strike then by default all U.S. strategic weapons become "first strike" weapons since they represent the only viable first strike capability. I fear that SDI success has the potential for stimulating the "use 'em or lose 'em" mentality.

STRATEGIC PLAN. The objective is to deter aggression and diminish the threat of nuclear warfare. If I were the President my strategic plan would be built around the following.

Step 1: Reevaluate our estimation of the Soviets' threshold of unacceptable loss on a recurring basis. To do this we must have the clearest possible assessment of Soviet intentions which means we must have increased HUMINT. I would undertake major efforts to increase our understanding of the Soviet leadership and populace. Gorbachev's new policy of openness and the opening borders of the East Bloc countries make this task more feasible. I would force into the system

the presumption of "no intent" for nuclear warfare on behalf of the Soviets, and accept only their intent for deterrence unless clear cut evidence could be provided to the contrary. Since second strike capability can also be first strike, I would presume second strike unless their deployment posture became provocative and I would communicate such to them. I know there are numerous professional advisors that will caution against too much trust, but my basic belief is that the Soviets now fear nuclear losses as much as we do since Chernobyl.

Step 2: Surety of Second Strike (SOSS) would be the focus of technological advancement. I would direct the efforts of SDI or other research efforts toward the defeat of defensive ABM systems rather than the defeat of strategic offensive systems. My objective would be to accept the existence of nuclear weapons and the potential damage they could inflict on the U.S. and place the investment in SOSS. Under a philosophy of SOSS the triad could be expanded to other platforms and mediums to ensure the ability to strike an aggressor anywhere on the globe. The mobile rail garrison, B-2, and even naval surface vessel launched strategic weapons could be added to the inventory to increase the "range" dimension of the nuclear force center of gravity. Until such time as a total nuclear treaty could be negotiated and signed, force modernization would have to continue.

Step 3: Signaling of Intention & Confidence Building. The first step is to make a unilateral reduction of 20% in the number of strategic nuclear weapons in the U.S. arsenal. In strategic arms talks I would offer to mutually reduce in quantity any strategic system but not eliminate any leg of the deterrence structure. I would

structure the deployment patterns of strategic nuclear forces to place the majority of forces out of striking range of Soviet territory in a non-provocative posture yet maintaining survivability. Only a minimal yet effective force would maintain an immediate and rapid strike capability. In this manner I would hope to convey a reduction of threat intention and call for a similar response from the Soviets. As a bold measure to signal only an intent for deterrence I would offer a "no first use" pact to the Soviets, where each country agrees to exclude the first use of nuclear weapons within the territorial borders of the other. This proposal would not prohibit first use against the others strategic forces outside of its borders. I would expect an eye opening response from the NATO countries since one consequence would be the limitation of nuclear first use to territories like theirs. Ultimately, that is not too unlike the scenario most everyone predicts as where first use would occur anyway. I think "first use" agreements must be reached and they must begin between the superpowers. Extension of "first use" agreements to alliances is a secondary issue for resolution after the deescalation process has gained momentum.

If pressed to war, my targeting philosophy would be based on current form of figure 3 which had been based on the best available intelligence to go after that aspect of the Soviet system most likely to result in a capitulation decision with the least number of nuclear weapons used.

**POTENTIAL RESULTS.** If my assumptions are wrong the first indicator will be the Soviet response to a unilateral 20% reduction in our nuclear inventory. A second indicator would be their response to

a decrease in the offensive posture of our nuclear force deployments. Third, would be their willingness or unwillingness to limit "first use" as a powerful indicator of "no intent". I think all steps can be undertaken without jeopardizing the national security and deterrent capability.

If I am correct in my assumptions the strategy could be the beginning of a pattern of nuclear deescalation and confidence building long overdue.